

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PLANNING



PUBLIC SPACE APPLICATION REVIEW

DATE: August 9, 2010
FROM: Joshua Ghaffari, Citywide Planner
ADDRESS: 3911 14th Street NW
APPLICATION: Unenclosed sidewalk café for 10 tables and 18 seats

Site Information

Zone: C-2-A
Historic District: No
CFA: No
Neighborhood Character: Neighborhood commercial district

Background:

This application was received by the Office of Planning on August 3, 2010. This café is for the adjacent Sisy's Pupuseria restaurant. In May 2008, the Public Space Committee approved a sidewalk cafe several blocks to the south at 3345 14th Street with 13 tables and 26 chairs in a total of 336 square feet. However, this is the first sidewalk café in this small commercial district.

Relevant Policies of Planning Initiatives

Policy T-2.4.4: Sidewalk Obstructions

Locate sidewalk cafes and other intrusions into the sidewalk so that they do not present impediments to safe and efficient pedestrian passage. Maintain sidewalk surfaces and elevations so that disabled or elderly pedestrians can safely use them. 410.8

Policy UD-3.1.8: Neighborhood Public Space

Provide urban squares, public plazas, and similar areas that stimulate vibrant pedestrian street life and provide a focus for community activities. Encourage the "activation" of such spaces through the design of adjacent structures; for example, through the location of shop entrances, window displays, awnings, and outdoor dining areas.

Policy UD-3.10: Sidewalk Cafes

Discourage the enclosure of sidewalk cafes in manner that effectively transforms them into indoor floor space. The design of sidewalk cafes should be compatible with the architectural qualities of the adjoining buildings, should complement the street environment, and should not impede pedestrian movement.

KEY ISSUES

The property is located in the Columbia Heights/Petworth neighborhood on 14th Street, NW, between Randolph and Shepherd Streets, NW. It is located in an area zoned C-2-A. There is a moderate level of pedestrian activity during working hours and at other times. This neighborhood is predominantly characterized as mixed used residential with neighborhood serving commercial.

The sidewalk where the sidewalk café is proposed is located along 14th Street and is 30 feet wide. The adjacent business has a 3 foot shop window projection. There are 4 feet at the curb set aside for

tree boxes and other street furniture. This leaves 23 feet to accommodate for pedestrians and café seating. The proposed seating area includes 10 tables and 18 seats in an area that is 285 square feet.

The café area extends into the sidewalk 19 feet. This leaves 4 feet of unobstructed sidewalk between the café and the 4 foot furniture zone at the curb. District regulations require a 10' clear pedestrian path adjacent to a sidewalk café, although the Public Space Committee has the authority to approve an adjacent clear pedestrian path of 6 feet. Since the site is located in a commercial district with moderate pedestrian activity, an adjacent clear sidewalk of 8 feet is appropriate.

The Public Space Committee requires that there be 15 square feet for every seat within a dining area. With an area of 285 square feet, this sidewalk café has enough space for 19 seats; the application is for 18 seats. However, this is based on the proposed size of the café that leaves an inadequate adjacent clear sidewalk, and the total square foot area of an approved café at this site is likely to decrease.

The applicant also proposes a 3 foot high fence along the perimeter of the café. The fence needs to be at least fifty percent open and be movable, so that it can be moved when the café is not in use.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Sidewalk cafes are one of the few ways that the District can activate public space in commercial areas. Wherever possible, the Office of Planning supports sidewalk cafes in public space. However, as proposed there is not enough of a clear pedestrian path provided.

The sidewalk café square footage and number of seats needs to be reduced. The café needs to be reduced from extending 19 feet to only 15 feet into the sidewalk, which will provide an adjacent 8' clear pedestrian path between the café and 4 foot tree box/furniture zone at the curb. The reduced dimensions for the café would be 14 feet by 15 feet, resulting in a new square foot area of 210 feet for a café that will allow a maximum of 14 seats.

The Office of Planning recommends that this application be approved with the conditions that the sidewalk café square footage be reduced to a maximum of 210 feet, which allows for an adjacent 8' clear pedestrian path and a maximum of 14 seats.